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IS ROOSEVELT AN ASSET OR A LIABILITY?

SEVEN years ago we pronounced Theodore Roosevelt the chief asset of the Republican party. He was then engaged in a struggle for supremacy with the oligarchy of the Senate, whose exercise of autocratic control on behalf of mercenaries had aroused grim resentment in the minds of the people. The dominant organization was distrusted because its leaders were discredited. From the smouldering fires of discontent there threatened to leap at any moment blazing flames of righteous anger. The party seemed to be doomed. Only the strongest imaginable counter-irritant could save it from its own subservience to specialized privilege. Fortunately or unfortunately, as one gauges what might have happened otherwise, the essential revivifying force appeared, like a meteor in the sky, in Theodore Roosevelt. It was as a force, such a force, that we proclaimed him the chief, if not indeed the sole remaining asset of the mighty body politic whose vitals had fallen victim to a mordant ulcer.

What follows is known of all. Guided by instinct so sure as to seem amazing and at times almost uncanny, stirred by innate daring so audacious as to make the highest courage seem insipid, unhampered by scruple as to method in fashioning achievements to satisfy clamor, the most venturous of beings of the present day touched, as with the rod of Moses, the rock from which there

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gushed a veritable geyser of popularity. The effect upon that ardent temperament was inevitable and irresistible. Himself became drunk from sense of power. Incalculable harm ensued from reckless acts and unconstrained mouthings. Dominance of the ego became absolute. He no longer interpreted the law. He was the law. He no longer expounded righteousness. He was righteousness incarnate. All men whose recollections differed from his were liars. All who disagreed were scoundrels. So it was then and so, we regret to say, after a full year of changing perspectives, relaxing concentrated mentality and resting jaded nerves, it is to-day. Such the force embodied in this Son—or should we say Child?—of Destiny.

For it is as a force, not as an individual, that we must continue to regard and reckon with Theodore Roosevelt. In no other way can accurate judgment be formed. Close touch with his captivating personality blinds the vision. Such another does not exist. It radiates joy. It infuses confidence. It implants faith. It inspires courage. It breathes an endowment of super-human insight. Its self-judgment, whether pretended or real, no less than its self-appreciation, instills belief in unwonted sagacity. Its very prankishness is as fascinating as its exuberance is enlivening. Its lack of humor is forgotten in the presence of abounding wit. Suspicions of insincerity disappear like mists from the face of the ocean before the gales of a truculent spirit. Such is the nature of the man—devoid of sympathy, yet strong in self-sensibility—far from lovable, yet among the most likable now in evidence anywhere.

But the attributes of the individual are but parts of the composition. Underneath is a sense of fatalism, complemented by a veritable obsession for practical application. A certain Pilgrim Father expressed loudly his disdain of ordinary precautions. When his time should come he should die; then and not before. This was his theory. What, his practice? Invariably, when sallying forth, he bore a rifle, lest, as he remarked in response to a question implying inconsistency, he should meet an Indian, whose time had come. No man has admitted more frankly than Theodore Roosevelt his endowment of physical courage; and yet, as with the Pilgrim Father, a weapon of defence was kept at hand when as President he was facing multitudes, lest it might be another whose time had come. So in politics as in war, or time

of possible danger, he is always armed, always ready and ever cautious. To say this is no disparagement. It is a mere indication of an odd blending of traits which are only seemingly adverse. In Roosevelt, contradictions are logical; else he would be as other men, and we should not now be considering him as a force for good or evil or as an asset contrasted with a liability.

So much for the atmosphere which envelops the personality. It need not have been depicted. It might have been ignored. So might backgrounds be eliminated from portraiture. So might foundations of buildings be left to the imagination. But, in attempting to conjecture what is to be, a glimpse at least should be taken of what has been and what is. None but a seer claiming supernatural vision would hazard speculation respecting the future unless somewhere among the pigeonholes of his brain he should hold information concerning the past. Even that most renowned of soothsayers which served the wizard of Abonotichus could not have drawn within its toils the Senators from Rome, but for the painstaking gleanings of the directive mind of its master.

To find the crux of energy is to bring its power within reach of the understanding. Theology has not yet solved the problem of creation. Science cannot place its finger upon the heart of radium. Happily, however, Roosevelt, the force, is not a riddle. None of the arts of the impressionist were utilized in his making. The outlines of his nature are no less distinct than the contour of his head or the rough draught of his body. He stands forth upon all occasions, sometimes to see, always to be seen, unabashed and unashamed, proud that God did make him thus. To some the figure seems heroic; to others, ludicrous. Behold the image of the idolator as portrayed with ruthless tenderness by an accompanying coadjutor in journalistic endeavor:

"The cumulative effect upon me of this extraordinary pilgrimage has been to give me a very distinct impression that the people, the political leaders, and the Governmental rulers of Europe recognize in Mr. Roosevelt a personification of the moral power of human nature, the power not merely to appreciate high ideals, but to put them into practical effect in every-day life. In addition, Mr. Roosevelt possesses great charm and attractiveness of person and of manner. It is difficult to say this in cold type; in paying a compliment even to a woman the man of tact and social skill prefers to do it in the form of allusion rather than of direct statement; but to explain the essential features of what may be said with-

out exaggeration to be one of the most remarkable journeys of history it is necessary for the moment to abandon reserve and state the bald facts."

Those from whom tributes such as this evoke scoffing are persons of little understanding. The twaddle is sincere and, though the hearts from which it springs may be unduly susceptible, the feeling voiced is genuine. Moreover, the very guilelessness of such an utterance makes for exactitude. The paying of a subtle compliment, "even to a woman," "in the form of an allusion," would indeed become "the man of tact and social skill," but in dealing with Roosevelt it is "necessary," as our thoroughly informed commentator observes, "to abandon reserve and state the bald facts." Otherwise the recipient would be left in the dark. To such an one, artful or insinuating flattery is but an inexplicable mist. Encomium, to be rendered comprehensible, must be bestowed as with an axe.

Opposed to the unctuous adulator stands the irrational contemner—he who laughs to scorn what he regards as mere pretence, derides what he assumes to be chicanery, sneers at what he calls presumption, and groans at what he dubs vulgarity. Such are the extremes of view. And the means are small in number. Just as the object itself is rugged in outline and translucent in appearance, so are the judgments of those who behold and marvel. To the eyes of many the figure is white as snow; to the vision of others it is black as night. To few is accorded the privilege of perceiving the blending of the colors. Yet to them alone appears the truth, for here, as we have said, inconsistency wears proudly and successfully the garment of logic.

But enough of imaginative analysis! Let us return to prosaic accountancy. An asset or a liability? is the question. Two ledgers lay before us—one of the Republican party and the other of the people. Take the first and turn the pages. The figures at the bottom equalize. All that Roosevelt, the force, has been or is stands as an obligation to the party. Opposed is the very existence of the party itself, accredited to Roosevelt, the force. There is no surplus. There are no undivided profits. There are no old claims to be settled or adjusted. The account balances and is closed.

Time has come for a new reckoning. Turn the page and take the pen. Is Roosevelt a liability or an asset? Who can say?

He fetches popularity sorely needed. He also brings confusion and distraction. He offers amazing power of effective appeal. In turn, he demands subserviency. He is willing, perforce, that for the time his own nominee shall continue to be President of the corporation, but he must be Chairman of the Board. The President as an official shall heed the by-laws, but he, the Chairman, must remain unfettered. The President shall safeguard the organization, but he, the Chairman, must be privileged ostentatiously to conspire with and furtively to aid and abet its enemies. He, the Chairman, must be the great judge—the final arbiter between President and directors on the one hand and recalcitrants on the other. He will be just and fair. The scales suspended from his strong right hand will be balanced as by a feather. Appeal from any decision that he may make, being unessential to considerations of equity, must never be taken. All must abide in faith in him *und Gott*.

These are the terms submitted by Theodore Roosevelt, the force, to the Republican party. They are compounded in the mortar of studied insults, which have been heaped upon the President of the Board, from the day on which its would-be Chairman arrived in Genoa and took to his bosom an employee whose virulent insubordination had necessitated his dismissal from the public service by the President himself. Subsequent happenings need not be recounted. All have been to the same effect. By implication as plain as it has been unvarying, he who proposes to become Chairman of the Board, with unlimited power and without official responsibility, has served notice upon the directors of the corporation that the cost of the popularity which he alone can put into its coffers is complete mastery, and in the doing thereof, to make his meaning unmistakable, he has brought humiliation to and heaped contumely upon the President whom he once pronounced and whom many still believe to be a noble man. A mighty asset to the Republican party or to any party is Roosevelt, the force. Is it worth the price? That is a question for the directors, conformably attired in either the garments of the proud, or in sackcloth and ashes, to decide. Far be it from us to intrude upon their partisan meditations.

But what of the people? How stands their account with Theodore Roosevelt? To his credit stands first the breaking of the power of the Senate oligarchy and the incitement of dis-

content which has resulted in healthy revolt. That was a mighty service, performed perhaps unintentionally, but already become, no less on that account, definitely and permanently effective. The much-vaunted arousal of the public conscience may have been offset by the consequences of vicious appeals to class prejudice and envy, but the rescue of the nation from a gorged, yet hungry, clique can and should never be forgotten. Whether in this age of commercial competition with other countries the so-called injection of a higher morality into business, with the aid of a bludgeon, transcends in value to the human race the virtual estoppel, for a time, of material progress, is a question upon which minds cannot readily meet. It need not now be considered. Suffice it to say that if in fact great good was accomplished by glaring misrepresentation and venomous abuse of individuals, great harm also ensued and grave personal injustices were wrought. To recount the wrongs and injuries inflicted upon thousands of innocent persons by Theodore Roosevelt, striving under the cloak of high ideals and patriotic impulse, would be a task as futile now as it has ever been distasteful.

It is with a sense of relief that we turn from that seamy record of reckless and flagitious performance to the clean page of unvarying recognition and appreciation accredited to the people. Against them in reckoning the account lies not a single debit. Without stint or measure they have hailed and gloried in the force as a force for good and in no instance for evil. They have extenuated its shortcomings, palliated its offences, pardoned its iniquities. They have followed like sheep and cheered like goats when lambs, in common with wolves, were haled to the sacrifice. To this day, in the minds of millions, the king can do no wrong. Will the time ever come when a fatal misstep will give rise to the suspicion that "the beginning of his words is," indeed, "foolishness" and "the end of his talk is mischievous madness"?

But why speculate? The accounts for the time are closed and balance. Splendid as have been the honors ungrudgingly bestowed by the people upon Theodore Roosevelt, no less signal and valuable have been the services which he has rendered in return. How, then, shall the force be classified? As a liability, we should say unhesitatingly, of the Republican party. As an asset, we declare with no less certainty, of the people.

But what of the immediate situation? Is a struggle for mas-

tery impending between the President and the self-appointed Chairman of the Board? Each to the other is under definite and lasting obligations, but that reckoning too may be considered ended. Each now stands upon his own pedestal and must of necessity uphold his own theories and sustain, in vital combat if need be, his own purposes. Neither as an individual can control his own actions. But recently Roosevelt, the man, declared that if a national election were to be held next November he undoubtedly would be the Republican candidate and would win. His personal desires would be negligible. Circumstances and conditions would dominate the situation, and his would be the rôle of a Son of Destiny.

So, on the other hand, conflicting emotions harass the patient, grateful and high-minded President. He may continue to love, or to think he loves, as often he has said, Roosevelt, the man. But he is dealing with Roosevelt, the force. Already members of his Cabinet feel that he has been betrayed and murmur in their bitterness. He cannot escape his responsibility to them and to those who have given their support cheerfully and unswervingly. He could not if he would, and it is not in his nature that he would if he could, reverse the policy which he has adopted as just and right. The Chairman, with all his agility and immunity from reprobation for contradictoriness, has advanced so far in the opposite direction that even he cannot retreat without admitting the sway of a craven spirit. Jovial personal greetings are to no purpose. A conflict is inevitable, although, in the end, when the one shall be saddened and the other sobered by defeat, it may not prove to be irrepressible.

Meanwhile, please God, as ever hitherto in a crisis of the Republic, a man will emerge from comparative political obscurity, capable of holding high the torch of personal liberty, that all the people may see the clear light and revert gladly to the pristine standard of individual and industrial progress which, despite temporary retrogression, continues to be the glory of the nation.

THE EDITOR.